

George Washington Papers, Series 3, Subseries 3F, Varick Transcripts, Letterbook 2

COUNCIL OF WAR⁹⁷

Head Quarters at Valley Forge, May 8, 1778.

The Commander in Chief informs the Council,

That the enemy's whole force within these States is distributed into three divisions, one at Philadelphia, one at New York and its dependencies, and one at Rhode Island, amounting, according to the best estimate he can form, to between sixteen and seventeen thousand rank and file fit for the field, exclusive of horse and artillery.

Their whole force in Philadelphia, consisting of the flower of their army is about 10,000 rank and file, exclusive of Marines and New levies, fortified by a strong chain of redoubts from Schuylkill to Delaware, with a small detached work at Bilingsport.

At New York, Long Island and Staten Island they have about 4000 rank and file, composed of a few British regiments, some German corps and new levies. The City is secured by shipping in front and on both flanks, and in the rear by Harlem River, by the

97. This council was held agreeable to the resolves of Congress of April 18 and 27. The members were: The Commander in Chief; Major Generals Gates, Greene, Stirling, Mifflin, Lafayette, De Kalb, Armstrong, and Steuben; Brigadier Generals Knox and Duportail.

forts, Independence and Washington, and by a country difficult of access.

At Rhode Island they have about 2000, mostly Germans. What fortifications, they may have raised, for their defence, is not particularly known; but they derive their principal security from the insular situation of the post and the protection of their Shipping.

He is not sufficiently acquainted with the general complexion of European intelligence, to be able to form any precise judgment of the reinforcements, which the enemy may expect this Campaign, or at what time they will arrive. But from such appearances as have fallen within his view, and supposing that England will be, in some measure, governed by the rules of prudence, and by a regard to her own honor, interest and safety and to the safety of her possessions abroad, He is led to conjecture they will, probably, not be very large nor very early.

The Commander in Chief further informs them:

That the whole of our Continental force hitherto assembled, lies in the States of Pensylvania and Delaware, and on the North River, and amounts to about Fifteen thousand rank and file, fit for the field, besides horse and Artillery.

The main body lies at this post, Valley forge, and in its vicinity, amounting to about 11,800 rank and file, capable of service; comprehending such of the sick present and on command, as might be called into action on any emergency, as per general return herewith submitted dated the 2d. instant.

The detachment at Wilmington in Delaware state is about 1400, comprehending a like proportion of sick present and on command, as above.

From the best judgment he can form not having had any late returns from that quarter, he imagines the force on the North River, at Fish Kill and its dependencies, may be about 1800, rank and file, fit for duty.

With respect to the reinforcements of Continental troops to be hereafter expected, he is destitute of any information, from the different states on which dependence may be placed; but judging of the future from the past, there will not be more in the field from every quarter, than abt. 20,000 rank

and file, fit for duty; unless the favourable events, which have lately taken place in our political system, should stimulate the states to greater and more successful exertions, than have been heretofore made.

The succours of Militia, which may be occasionally drawn to the aid of the army, will not admit of an exact calculation. Notwithstanding the most pressing applications, a greater number could not be collected at anytime in the course of the last campaign to reinforce the Southern army, than between three and four thousand men; and generally there was far short of three thousand. With the Northern army there was about

What quantity of ordnance, small arms and military stores our magazines will afford for the use of the ensuing campaign, He is unable to decide; but imagines there will not be a

sufficiency for any regular seige, if there is for the contingencies of the field.

In regard to supplies of provisions, The Commissary's department has been for some time past in such a defective and disordered state, that no accurate estimate can be formed. The Gentleman lately appointed to the head of it, reports that his prospects are tolerably good, though he cannot with any precision ascertain their extent.

Having stated these particulars for the consideration of the Council, The Commander in Chief requests, that after a full and candid discussion of the matter in council, each member would furnish him with his sentiments in writing on some general plan, which, considering all circumstances, ought to be adopted for the operations of the next campaign.⁹⁸

98. The draft is in the writing of Alexander Hamilton. The unanimous decision of the members was "to remain on the defensive and wait events; without attempting any offensive operation of consequence, unless the future circumstances of the enemy, should afford a fairer opportunity, than at present exists" It was considered that Philadelphia could not be taken by assault, nor could it be successfully blockaded with less than 30,000 men. An attempt upon New York City was open to the same general objections. These decisions, signed by the members of the council, dated May

9, 1778, are in the *Washington Papers*. Gen. Charles Lee, who was absent “from indisposition,” subscribed to the opinion of the council on May 22.

COUNCIL OF WAR³⁸

Head Quarters, Valley Forge, June 17, 1778.

38. At this council there were, besides the Commander in Chief, Major Generals Lee, Greene, Arnold, Stirling, Lafayette, and Steuben, and Brigadier Generals Smallwood, Knox, Poor, Paterson, Wayne, Woodford, Muhlenberg, Huntington, and Duportail. Brig. Gen. John Cadwalader was also asked for an opinion, although he was not a member of the council. Only Wayne and Cadwalader were unequivocally in favor of attacking the British on their march if they moved through New Jersey to New York. Stirling, Lafayette, Steuben, Smallwood, and Knox were in favor of annoying the enemy as much as possible without bringing on a general action. Duportail was partially in favor of such a thing, but advised great caution; Muhlenberg was in favor of an attack only if the British quitted Philadelphia and endeavored to establish themselves elsewhere and did not attempt to move through Jersey. All the council were opposed to attacking Philadelphia in any event, and all but Greene, Wayne, and Cadwalader were opposed to moving from Valley Forge before the British intentions were clearly perceived. Most of the council were opposed to sending any strong detachment from Valley Forge into Jersey in anticipation of the British move.

The Commander in Chief informs the council, that from a variety of concurring intelligence, there is the strongest reason to believe the enemy design speedily to evacuate Philadelphia; having actually put all their heavy baggage, cannon and stores on board their transports, which have fallen down the river, and having sent across to the Jersey shore, the principal part of their waggons, containing their light baggage and a considerable part of their force, including, according to several recent accounts, almost the whole of their cavalry; their grenadiers and light infantry, a brigade of British and some regiments of New levies, being the only troops now remaining in the city. That from every appearance the most natural inference is, they are destined for New York, either by marching through the Jerseys towards Amboy, or down the river to some convenient place of

embarkation, and thence round by water; but as it is far from impossible, they may only mean to draw us out of this strong position, throw us off our guard and attack us to advantage or may intend some southern expedition, these objects ought duly to be attended to. That their

force amounts to about 10,000 rank and file, fit for duty.

He further states to them, that the strength of the army at this post, including those on command, who might be drawn together in time of action, and such of the sick present as might be capable of acting on an emergency, is 12,500 rank and file. That of these near 11,000 would be able to march off the ground, in a condition for service; That there are now in camp about 2300, who, from sickness and want of necessaries, would be unable to march with the army for the purpose of operating; but would most of them be able to travel moderately to some place of greater security, into the country, in case of a removal of the army. That besides these there are in the rear of this camp within the distance of eight or ten miles, twelve hundred who would be incapable of removing themselves in case of necessity; but must be carried away in waggons, if it should become requisite. That there are no very considerable magazines, either in camp, or in its vicinity; but there are some valuable stores, in the Quarter Master General's department, at Reading; and two large depositories of military stores at Lebanon and Carlisle. That there are parcels of flour and other provisions dispersed in different parts of this state; but no material quantity at any one place.

His Excellency also informs the Council, that there is a brigade of Continental troops in the Jerseys consisting of about 800 fit for duty, and that all the Militia of that state, have been notified of the probability of the enemy's marching through it, and warned to collect, on signals for the purpose, to give them all the annoyance and

disturbance in their power, in concert with the Continental troops.

He observes to them also, that on a junction of the enemy's force in and near Philadelphia, and that which they already have at New York, and its dependencies, their number will amount to between

14 and 15,000. That on our part, when this army shall be united to the one on the North River, we shall have near 14,000 Continental troops, fit for service.

Having stated these facts, for the information of the Council, The Commander in Chief requests, after a personal discussion of the subject, that each member will favour him with his opinion in writing, on the conduct, which it will be adviseable for this army to observe on the present occasion, and under present appearances, in determining which, though he would not wish to confine the attention of the Council solely to these objects. He recommends the following questions to their mature consideration.

Whether any enterprise ought to be undertaken against the enemy in Philadelphia, in their present circumstances?

Whether this army should remain in the position it now holds, 'till the final evacuation of the city or move immediately towards the Delaware?

Whether any detachment of it shall be sent to reinforce the Brigade in the Jerseys, or advanced towards the enemy to act as occasion shall require and endeavour to take advantage of their retreat?

If the army remain on its present ground, 'till the

enemy quit the city, and if they march, through the Jerseys towards Amboy, will it be practicable, from the obstruction they may probably receive from the troops already there, in conjunction with the Militia, to arrive in time with this Army, to give them any material interruptions? Will it be prudent to attempt it, or not rather more eligible to proceed to the North River, in the most direct and convenient manner, to secure the important communication between the Eastern and Southern states?

In case such measures should be adopted, as will enable this army to overtake the enemy in their march, will it be prudent, with the aid, which may reasonably be expected from the Jersey Militia, to make an attack upon them, and ought it to be a partial or a general one?

In case of an immediate removal of this army, what precautions will be proper for the security of the sick belonging to it, and of the store in this state?³⁹

39. In the writing of Alexander Hamilton.

COUNCIL OF WAR¹⁹

Hopewell Township, New Jersey, June 24, 1778.

His Excellency informs the Council, that by the latest advices he has received, the Enemy are in two columns, one on the Allen Town and the other on the Borden Town Road. The front of the latter near the Drawbridge, at which the two Roads unite in the main Cranbury road; Their force from the best estimate he can form is between 9 and 10,000 rank and file.

That the strength of the Army on this Ground, by a Field return made two days since, consisted of 10,684 rank and file; besides which there is an advanced Brigade under General Maxwell of about 1200. That, in addition to this force, from the account given by General Dickinson, there appear to be about 1200 Militia, collected in the Neighbourhood of the Enemy, who in conjunction with General Maxwell are hovering on their flanks and rear and obstructing their march.

He further informs the Council, that measures have been

19. The council consisted of the Commander in Chief, Major Generals Lee, Greene, Stirling, Lafayette, and Steuben; Brigadier Generals Knox, Poor, Wayne, Woodford, Paterson, Scott, and Du Portail.

taken to procure an aid of Pennsylvania Militia; which have not as yet produced any material effect. General Cadwalader with fifty or Sixty Volunteers and a detachment of Continental Troops, amounting to about 300, were to cross the Delaware yesterday morning and fall in with the Enemy's rear, General Lacey had crossed with 40 men.

He observes to the Council that it is now the seventh day since the Enemy evacuated Philadelphia during which time, they have marched less than 40 miles; That the obstructions thrown in their way, by breaking down Bridges, felling Trees &c were insufficient to produce so great delay, as is the opinion of General Dickinson himself, who has principally directed them; and that the opposition, they have otherwise received, has not been very considerable.

Under these circumstances, and considering the present situation of our national affairs and the probable prospects of the Enemy, the General requests the sentiments of the Council on the following questions:

Will it be adviseable for us, of choice, to hazard a general action?

If it is, should we do it, by immediately, making a general attack upon the Enemy, by attempting a partial one, or by taking such a position, if it can be done, as may oblige them to attack us ?

If it is not, what measures can be taken, with safety to this Army, to annoy the Enemy in their march, should it be their intention to proceed through the Jerseys.²⁰

20. The council decided against bringing on a general action and approved detaching 1,500 men to annoy the left flank and rear of the British. The decisions are in the writing of Alexander Hamilton. All but Wayne signed the proceedings.

In fine, what precise line of conduct will it be best for us to pursue?²¹

21. In the writing of Robert Hanson Harrison.

COUNCIL OF WAR³²

The Commander in Chief stated to the Board, that

32. "At a Board of General Officers, assembled at Head Quarters at Reuben Wright's in the neighbourhood of White Plains on Saturday the 25 day of July, 1778."

the Two Armies, which had heretofore acted in different Quarters, had formed a junction. That the whole was composed of Troops from the several States from New Hampshire to North Carolina inclusive. That the Army was about to take a Camp, which might possibly be of some permanency. That for it's regularity and more effectual operation; as well as to prevent every possible ground of jealousy, and to preserve harmony through all it's parts, it was necessary to adopt some mode of arrangement and a certain disposition.

Having stated these several matters to the Board, the Commander in chief requested them to take them into consideration, and propounded the following Questions for their advice.

1st. Will it be best for the Troops of each State to encamp together?

2d. What will be the best mode of arranging and disposing of the Troops throughout the line upon the present or a future occasion?³³

The Board having given their advice upon the foregoing points, the Commander in Chief proceeded to state,

33. The board answered these questions: (1) That it would be best for the troops of each State to camp together; and (2) That the troops should be arranged geographically, relative to their present frontage to the ocean, but that there should be no post of honor between them.

That the proposed Camp at White plains was about 15 miles from York Island. That the Enemy from the information he had received, were in possession of Fort Independence &c. on the Heights this side King's bridge, and also of Fort Washington and the strong grounds at the North entrance of York Island. Than from the advices he had been able to obtain, they had Two Camps on Long and Staten Islands; but as to the precise number of men in each or either he was uninformed. That he could not ascertain the Enemy's present force on York Island and the Heights this side King's

bridge, nor what their whole strength would be, if the Troops were drawn from Long and Staten Islands; However, that he should suppose it would amount to about 14,000, rank and file, fit for duty; and that from his latest and best accounts, they had several ships of War between New York and Sandy Hook.

That by the last return we had 16782 rank and file fit for duty. That out of this number, a detachment of about 2000 had marched to the Eastward. That another detachment of about 400 had moved towards the Western frontiers of this State. That Maxwells Brigade consisting of 1100 were at Elizabeth Town in Jersey. That Vanschaicks Regiment of about 400 was in the Neighbourhood of Hackensack. That about 900 fit for duty were at the Posts in the Highlands and at Kings ferry, besides the New levies which are ordered down. That the remainder of the Army amounting to between 11 and 12,000 were at the White plains and in their vicinity. That the French Squadron, under Admiral, Count D'Estaing had left Sandy Hook and put to Sea.

The several matters above, being before the Board, the Commander in Chief requested, that after their consideration of the same, they would deliver their Opinions, upon the following questions.³⁴

1st. Whether we can make an attack upon the Enemy's Posts, either on the Heights on this side King's bridge, or on those on York Island, with a probability of success?

2d. If an Attack cannot be made, in the opinion of the Board, with a probability of success, should the Army advance and take Post nearer the Enemy, or continue on the Grounds it now occupies, at or about the White plains?³⁵

34. The decision on the first question was that an attack could not be made with any probability of success; and to the second question, that the army should not advance.

35. The proceedings are in the writing of Robert Hanson Harrison and are signed by Maj. Gens. Israel Putnam, Horatio Gates, Nathanael Greene, Lord Stirling, Baron de Kalb, Alexander McDougall, and Baron von Steuben, and by Brig, Gens. John Nixon, Samuel Holden Parsons,

James Clinton, William Smallwood, Henry Knox, Enoch Poor, John Paterson, Anthony Wayne, William Woodford, Peter Muhlenberg, Charles Scott, Jedidiah Huntington, and Chevalier Du Portail. Brig. Gen. John Glover and Lewis Morris, a Signer of the Declaration of Independence and at this date a brigadier general of New York Militia, were also present at the council but did not sign the proceedings.

To THE MAJOR AND BRIGADIER GENERALS

Head Quarters, Fredericksburg, October 14, 1778.

Sir: I have been waiting impatiently for the movements of the enemy to come to an issue that might ascertain their intentions for the Winter, which has hitherto prevented my taking the present step; but the uncertainty in which they still continue involved, and the advanced Season of the year, will no longer admit of delay in fixing upon a plan for the general disposition of the Army in winter quarters.⁵⁴ In determining this, it will readily occur to you that the following particulars are to be considered. The security of the Army itself, its subsistence and accommodation, the protection of the Country, the support of our important posts, the relation which ought to be preserved with the french Fleet should it remain where it is, depending on the degree of probability of a Winter operation against it, and the succour it may derive from the troops under Genl. Sullivan and the Militia of the Country.

After a full consideration of these points, and of any other matters requiring attention, you will be pleased to favr. me with your opinion as speedily as possible. The main Questions to be decided are, whether the Army shall be kept in a collected State

54. On this same day (October 14) Washington wrote to Gates and Baron De Kalb asking that they, with Generals Poor, Paterson, and Smallwood, meet at headquarters at 10 a.m., Friday, October 16, "to consult upon a proper disposition for the Winter Quarters of the Army under present appearances and circumstances." This letter is in the *Washington Papers*.

and where, whether it be distributed into Cantonments and in what manner and places, how soon it shall enter into quarters, and what precautions shall be used in respect to covering provisions and Forage. I am, etc.⁵⁵

To LORD STIRLING, BRIGADIER GENERALS WILLIAM MAXWELL AND PETER MUHLENBERG

Head Quarters, October 15, 1778.

In addition to the questions already proposed for the consideration of the General Officers,⁷⁰ I have further asked, whether judging from the present State and appearance of affairs, it would be advisable to detach any part of the Army to Boston and should it be determined in the affirmative; What force it would be proper to detach there. You will be pleased to favor me with your opinion on these subjects. I am, etc.⁷¹

55. In the writing of Tench Tilghman. From the text of the letter sent to General Clinton, kindly furnished by Dr. A. S. W. Rosenbach, of New York City. The draft, in the writing of Alexander Hamilton, shows that this same letter was sent to Lord Stirling, Baron De Kalb, Maj. Gen. Israel Putnam, and Brig. Gens. James Clinton, William Woodford, and Peter Muhlenberg.

70. See Washington's letter To the Major and Brigadier Generals, Oct. 14, 1778, *ante*.

71. The draft is in the writing of James McHenry and indorsed by him: "Addit. Questns. for the Council of War." (See Council of War, Oct. 16, 1778, *post*.)

COUNCIL OF WAR⁷⁵

Fredericksburgh, October 16, 1778.

The Commander in Chief informs the Council, that the enemy's whole force in these States still continue in two principal divisions one at New York and its dependencies consisting of about thirteen thousand; the other on Rhode Island consisting of about five thousand. That a considerable detachment from the former sent three or four weeks since into Bergen county, in the Jerseys, have hitherto been employed in a forage, part are said to have lately returned and the remainder it is given out, intend to cut a quantity of wood before they leave the Jerseys.

That their fleet was still in the harbour of New York the 9th instant, rumoured to intend shortly sailing for Boston.

That the general current of intelligence from New York indicates preparations *to be in readiness* to leave that post, and more particularly a design of making a considerable detachment, generally

75. This Council of War was composed of the Commander in Chief, Maj. Gens. Horatio Gates, Nathanael Greene, Baron De Kalb, Alexander McDougall, and Baron Steuben; Brig. Gens. John Nixon, Samuel Holden Parsons, William Smallwood, Henry Knox, John Paterson, Anthony Wayne, and Edward Hand.

supposed for the West Indies, the number mentioned from ten to fifteen regiments, which are reported to have been filled up, by the reduction of some other regiments. That an officer of ours, prisoner with the enemy, just exchanged brings an account of the actual embarkation of a large body of troops, on Saturday night and Sunday last, said to be destined for the Southward, of which however, no confirmation has been received from any other quarter.

That our whole force in this quarter is about fifteen thousand rank and file, fit for duty; including the two brigades in the Jerseys, and the garrison at West Point, a considerable part of which have completed and will soon complete the term of service, for which they are engaged.

That General Sullivan has under his command at Providence. and its dependencies about 3500 Continental and State troops.

From this state of facts and under these circumstances, the Commander in Chief requests the opinion of the Council, whether it will be prudent and adviseable to make a detachment from the main army towards Boston, and of what force.

He further informs the Council, that he has been impatiently waiting for the movements of the enemy to ascertain their intentions for the Winter, in order to enable him the better to judge of a proper disposition of the army in Winter quarters; but the uncertainty, in which their designs still continue involved and the advanced season of the year, will no longer admit of delay, in fixing upon a plan for this important purpose. He therefore requests the advice of the council on the following points: whether the army shall be held in a

collected state during the Winter and where? whether it shall be distributed into cantonments and in what particular manner? what precautions shall be adopted in either case to shelter the troops and procure subsistence both of provision and forage?

He observes: That in determining these questions, the considerations principally to be attended to are, the actual strength and situation and the probable designs of the enemy; the security, good government and discipline of the army; the difficulties of subsistence and accommodation; the protection of the country; the support of our important posts; the relation proper to be preserved with the French, [fleet]⁷⁶ considering the degree of probability of its remaining where it now is, and of a winter operation against it, and the occasional succour it may derive from the troops under General Sullivan and from the Militia of the Country.⁷⁷

He finally informs the Council that some time since, he directed the Quarter Master General to endeavour to provide materials for barracks. The result of his measures will appear in a letter from Mr. Pettit hereunto annexed.⁷⁸

76. The word "fleet" was inadvertently omitted here.

77. Most of the opinions, in answer to these queries, were submitted in writing to the Commander in Chief on October 20 and are in the *Washington Papers*.

78. Deputy Quartermaster General Charles Pettit's letter of October 16 to Alexander Hamilton accompanies this record of the Council of War, in the *Washington Papers*, which is in Hamilton's writing. A copy by Tench Tilghman, which varies slightly from the above, is also in the *Washington Papers*, and another copy by Tilghman is in the Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

COUNCIL OF GENERAL OFFICERS

Head Quarters, Middle Brook, April 10, 1779.

The Commander in Chief states to the Council, that since the last meeting of Commissioners on the subject of an exchange of Prisoners, the result of which is contained in a report of their proceedings of the 15th. of December last, hereunto annexed, a deputation has been sent to Congress by our officers prisoners with the enemy, with a memorial representing their situation and requesting that some effectual measures might if possible be adopted for their liberation from captivity: And that the Honorable the Congress, in consequence, came to a resolution of the 5th. ultimo, which is also hereunto annexed; authorising the Commander in Chief, “at his discretion, to negotiate and establish with the Commander in Chief of his Britannic Majesty's forces, a Cartel, or Agreement, for a general exchange of prisoners, comprehending the Convention troops; or a more partial Agreement for any particular or definite number of prisoners; and to fix and conclude upon the terms and conditions of the said exchange, ascertaining and allowing an equivalent of inferior for superior officers and an equivalent of privates for officers, according to such proportion as has been customary, or shall appear to him to be just and equitable; and to appoint commissioners for these purposes”.

That in obedience to the foregoing resolve: He made a proposal to Sir Henry Clinton in a letter of the 14th. of March, for a meeting of commissioners to settle a general cartel; which was acceded to

by him in his answer of the 31st; and by subsequent arrangements the proposed meeting is to take place on Monday the 12th. instant.⁵⁷

That as the enemy have few or no private

57. These proceedings are headed "Council of War." They are in the writing of Richard Kidder Meade and Robert Hanson Harrison and are signed by Maj. Genls, John Sullivan, Nathanael Greene, Lord Stirling, Arthur St. Clair, and Baron de Kalb; Brig. Genls. William Smallwood, Henry Knox, and William Woodford. The council decided that a thousand British private soldiers could be given in exchange for the American officers, prisoners with the enemy "but not a greater number."

men of ours in their hands the exchange at present must turn, on their principles from which we have every reason to believe they will not depart, upon our giving a considerable proportion of privates in exchange for our officers in their possession; an estimate of the amount on the several propositions and ratios which have been suggested is herewith submitted. The General therefore requests the advice of the Council what number of private men consistent with justice to the officers in captivity and to the public in general, ought to be determined as the ultimate proportion, which should govern an exchange at this time and which the Commissioners on our part should be instructed not to exceed.

CIRCULAR TO THE GENERAL OFFICERS IN CAMP⁶

Head Quarters, Middle Brook, May 28, 1779.

Sir: The knowledge you have of the general situation of the enemy makes it unnecessary I should enter into any further detail than barely to inform you:

That their number at New York Staten and Long Island, supposing the detachment which went to Virginia to consist of 2000 men, agreeable to the accounts I have received, amounts according to the best estimate I have been able to form to about 9000 men. At Rhode Island their strength is about 5 or 6000. Their remaining force in these States is in Georgia and Virginia. In addition to

these, their whole influence is exerted to stimulate the Indians from one end of the Western frontier to the other against us, and reinforcements are expected from Europe. But what may be their precise destination or amount is uncertain. The current of intelligence points to New York and to at least 5000 men.

Our own force and present disposition are pretty well known to you; but to give a more exact idea, I shall observe, that besides the Pennsylvania, Maryland and Virginia troops now in the Camp and the North Carolina troops at Paramus, there are

6. Maj. Gens. Nathanael Greene, Baron de Kalb, Arthur St. Clair, Robert Howe, and Baron Steuben; Brig. Gens. William Smallwood, William Woodford, Henry Knox, William Irvine, Du Portail, and Peter Muhlenberg.

three Brigades of Massachusetts troops and one of Connecticut on the North River, one of the latter at Danbury and about 2500 Continental troops at Rhode Island. You will be able to form a sufficiently accurate judgment of the collective strength of these Corps; but if you should wish for more precise information, you can obtain it by applying to me. The rest of our force except about 6 or 700 on the Ohio will be employed to the Westward against the Indians.

I can say scarcely any thing of the reinforcements we have reason to expect. The measures persuing by the several States to augment their battalions and the success with which they are attended have as yet come but partially to my knowledge. I fear our prospects are very inconsiderable.

Under this concise account of matters and taking a comprehensive view of our affairs in general, particularly the State of our supplies and the depreciation of our currency. I am to request you will favor me with your opinion of the plan of conduct which it will be proper for us to persue at this juncture for the advancement of the common cause and for the honor and interest of the American arms; in doing which, I shall be obliged by a very free and full communication of your sentiments. I am, etc.⁷

7. In the writing of Richard Kidder Meade. The text is from a photostat of the original sent to Maj. Gen. Arthur St. Clair, kindly furnished by Judge E. A. Armstrong, of Princeton, N.J. The draft, in the *Washington Papers*, is in the writing of Alexander Hamilton, and in the Historical Society of Pennsylvania is the copy sent to Brig. Gen. William Irvine.

COUNCIL OF GENERAL OFFICERS

Head Quarters, Middle Brook, June 1, 1779.

The General states to the Council that in the Court Martial appointed for the trial of Major General Arnold, Brigadier General Irvin, Colo. Butler and Lt. Colo. Harmar of the Pennsylvania line were nominated Members. That Major General Arnold this day, at the meeting of the Court objected to these three Gentlemen, by a *peremptory challenge* and that his objection was admitted by the Court, and signified in a Letter from the Judge Advocate hereunto annexed; requesting the appointment of two other Members to replace them, there having been a mistake in the first nomination of Fourteen instead of thirteen Members.

As the Articles of War are intirely silent on the right of the prisoner to challenge the Members of a Court either peremptorily or otherwise, and consequently on the extent of that right, with respect to the proportion of Members subject to be challenged. The Commander in Chief requests the opinion of the Council upon this subject, that some general principle

may be adopted to regulate the present and all future trials.⁸⁸

The General further states to the Council, that in the formation of the Court appointed, regard was had as is customary to a proportion between the Officers of the different corps, composing the Army in this Camp, which will appear from the List of Officers herewith. He therefore requests the opinion of the Council from what line it will be most advisable to take the Officers to replace the Two Members now deficient. This he doubts not will be governed by a due regard to Military propriety and the convenience of the Army as well as by other considerations.⁸⁹

88. The proceedings are signed by Nath Greene, Stirling, Baron de Kalb, Steuben, Du Portail, Wm. Irvine, W. Smallwood, H. Knox, Win. Woodford, and P. Muhlenberg. (See Washington's letter to Timothy Matlack, June 2, 1779, *post.*)

89. In the writing of Robert Hanson Harrison.

COUNCIL OF GENERAL OFFICERS⁵⁵

Head Quarters, July 26, 1779.

55. Those present, in addition to the Commander in Chief, were: Major Generals Heath, Greene, St. Clair, Howe, Kalb, McDougall, and Steuben, and Brigadier Generals Nixon, Parsons, Smallwood, Knox, Paterson, Wayne, Huntington, Du Portail, Gist, and Irvine. The council decided that the Mustermaster Department was unnecessary, and Doctor Shippen could not be tried then nor could a precise time be fixed for a trial.

The Commander in Chief laid before the Council sundry papers relative to the Muster Masters department transmitted him by a Committee of Congress in a letter of the 5th instant, and requested their advice respecting the matters therein referred to his consideration; but particularly as “to the necessity or expediency of continuing the department” in the present circumstances of the army.

He also submitted a letter from Congress of the 20th. instant, transmitting sundry letters and papers relative to certain complaints, preferred by Doctor Morgan against Doctor Shippen, Director General; and requested the opinion of the Board on the measures which it will be proper for him to pursue in consequence; whether at this time to arrest Doctor Shippen or not, and whether to bring him to an immediate trial, or defer it, to a future and more convenient period.⁵⁶

56. In the writing of Alexander Hamilton and Robert Hanson Harrison.

COUNCIL OF WAR⁵⁷

Head Quarters at West Point, July 26, 1779.

The General States to the Council that by his last advices the enemy had repossessed Stoney point with between thirteen and fourteen hundred men under the Command of Brigr Stirling⁵⁸

57. The same officers composed this council of war as composed the preceding council of general officers (July 26) except Brig. Gen. John Paterson.

58. Brig. Thomas Sterling', of the British Army, aide-de-camp to the King.

and were very busily employed in reconstructing the works. That they had reinforced Verplanks point with four companies of Fannings Corps which now increased the garrison to about 700 Men. That the remainder of their force had been encamped near Dobbss ferry and at Phillipsburgh; but by some advices (not yet well confirmed) a very considerable part is said to have embarked and the Shipping containing them to have fallen down the river on the afternoon of the 22d., their destination unknown. That on the evening of the 22d, forty sail of Vessels passed by Norwalk steering Eastward; no mention made of their having troops on board. That the enemys whole efficient force in this quarter under Genl. Clinton, including the late reinforcement from Rhode Island and the garrisons of New York Long and Staten Island amounts by the best estimate he has been able to form, to about twelve thousand exclusive of Cavalry and Artillery.

The Genl. further informs the Council, that our whole force in this quarter, exclusive of Cavalry and Artillery also and including the Garrison of West point amounts to nearly 10,300, That two divisions of the right wing are at this post and in the vicinity amounting with the garrison, to about 5800, one division of 1700 at Suffrans; the left wing on the East side of the river, two Brigades opposite West point one Brigade at the gorge of the mountains in the rear of the Continental Village, and one Brigade at Ridgefield the whole amounting to about 2800.⁵⁹

The Commander in Chief submits the above state of facts to the consideration of the Council and requests they will favour

59. A rough memorandum in the writing of Hamilton is filed in the *Washington Papers* under the tentative date of July 25, 1779. It gives the strength of the Continental Army as 10,300; of the British at 12,000; 1,300 at Stony Point; 700 at Verplancks; and the main body at Philipse's. The questions submitted to the council of war, July 26, are noted, as also the queries propounded to the council of general officers, that same date.

him with their opinion tomorrow at Twelve O'Clock respecting a general disposition for the army, on a comprehensive view of our circumstances and prospects;⁶⁰ the comparative strength of the two armies and those objects, which from their importance demand our principal attention, including the discussion of this question, whether any and what offensive operations can with propriety be undertaken by us against the enemy, at the present juncture?⁶¹

60. The unanimous decision of the council of war was that West Point must be defended; Stony and Verplanck's Points could not be successfully attacked and were not worth the cost of victory. Seven generals thought that continuous feints against these posts would have value; but only one, Parsons, was in favor of a real attack. The opinions, in writing, are in the *Washington Papers*, under dates of July 26 and 27.

61. The draft is in the writing of Richard Kidder Meade.

COUNCIL OF WAR⁸⁰

Head Quarters, Morris Town, March 27, 1780.

The Commander in Chief states to The Council, that by his latest advices from South Carolina Sir Henry Clinton was arrived there with the force under his command and about the beginning of this month was advanced as far as Stono-ferry, having remained more than twenty days nearly in the same position. That the detachment which went with him from New York was estimated at about 6000; that it is unknown, whether he drew any reinforcement from Savannah, or whether the detachment suffered any considerable loss, in the Storms to which it was exposed during the

voyage, a circumstance denied by the enemy. That however there is good intelligence of their having lost their cavalry and every reason to believe that the whole or the greatest part of their waggon-horses experienced a like fate, probably many waggons and boats were also lost, which must necessarily be at least a temporary check to their operations. That by late accounts from New York, there is an appearance of additional succours going from that place, though these accounts still require confirmation.

80. Those present, in addition to Washington, were Maj. Genls. Arthur St. Clair and Baron de Kalb, and Brig. Genls. James Clinton, William Maxwell, Henry Knox, Edward Hand, and Mordecai Gist.

That General Lincoln's forces the beginning of January last consisted of about one thousand infantry and five hundred cavalry comprehending the Regiment in march under Col. Washington, Continental troops, besides the militia of the Town and other militia called for from the Country and expected, since which Brigadier General Hogan had arrived with the North Carolina regiments of about four hundred men; and the Virginia troops under General Woodford about one thousand in number were within three hundred and eighty miles of Charles Town the 11th. instant. That General Lincoln's disposition seems to be to garrison Charles Town with the greatest part of his force, and leave the cavalry with such infantry as may occasionally collect to them to cover the country and harass the enemy's communications.

That the naval force with which the enemy sailed from New York upon the Southern expedition consisted of five sail of the line (one of which has foundered on the passage) one fifty-gun ship two 44s. and a 20, with a few small armed vessels; besides which they may have been joined by the vigilant of 24 heavy cannon and some armed vessels, which were already in that quarter. That Charles-Town harbour was defended by four Continental frigates, two state ships to be armed with heavy cannon and some other armed vessels making in the whole fourteen, exclusive of gallies, *supposed* to be a sufficient security to the harbour.

The Commander in Chief takes occasion to observe, that notwithstanding the hopes which seem to be entertained of an effectual defence much is to be apprehended for the

event of the siege, as the loss of Charles Town and its garrison, would probably involve the most calamitous consequences to the whole state of South Carolina, and even perhaps beyond it.

His Excellency further states that our operating force at this post amounts to about 7000 rank and file, thirteen hundred of whom will have completed their term of service the last of May; at the Highlands about 2600 including twelve hundred whose services will expire at the same period and at Danbury about 800, including three hundred of the same description, besides which are two more broken regiments of dragoons and Lee's corps. That not less from the embarrassments in the Quarter Master's and Commissary's departments than from the season it will be impracticable for some time to put the army in motion if it were necessary.

That the enemy's present operating force at New York and its dependencies is estimated at Eleven thousand rank and file, the whole of which by several concurring accounts has been said to be some time preparing for a movement.

His Excellency having thus given the Council a general view of affairs as well to the Southward as here requests their opinion in writing with their reasons whether any further force can at this time be spared from the army here to reinforce that in South Carolina, whether it will be adviseable to make such a detachment and to what amount; also in case a detachment should be made what disposition ought to take place of the remaining force.⁸¹

81. In the writing of Alexander Hamilton. Several words have been supplied from the Varick Transcripts in the Library of Congress, where the original is mutilated.

Although Lord Stirling was not present at this council, he submitted an opinion on March 30. All the other generals submitted their opinions on March 29. The decision was unanimous that no detachment could safely be made from the army at Morristown.

COUNCIL OF WAR³³

Head Quarters, Morris Town, April 1, 1780.

33. The members, exclusive of the Commander in Chief, were: Maj. Gens. Lord Stirling, St. Clair, and De Kalb, and Brigadier Generals Clinton, Maxwell, Knox, Hand, Huntington, and Gist. The council advised, in case the British made the detachment from New York, "or one nearly equal to it, that about Two Thousand Men should be sent from hence to reenforce the Southern States." This decision was signed by all the members, except Washington.

The General states to the Council that since they met on the 27th of last month, he has received further accounts from New York, which appears authentic, that Lord Rawdon's³⁴ Brigade, said to consist of his own Regiment and of Brown's,³⁵ Fanning's³⁶ and another Corps; also Two Hessian Regiments and the 42d and another British Regiment, estimated at about 2500 rank and file, were preparing to embark and it was generally believed to reinforce the Army under Sir Henry Clinton at the Southward. Under this information and supposing that this embarkation should actually take place, The General requests the Council to advise him, whether a Detachment and to what amount should be sent from this Army to reinforce in the Southern States and at what period they should commence their march.

34. Francis, Lord Rawdon. He was colonel of Volunteers of Ireland, British Provincial Troops.

35. Lieut Col. Thomas Brown, of the King's Carolina Rangers, British Provincial Troops.

36. Col. Edmund Fanning, of the King's American Regiment, British Provincial Troops.